

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: L&L Building

other names/site number: Arcade Bar

2. Location

street & number: 2624 Minnesota Avenue

city or town: Billings

state: Montana (MT)

code: 30 county: Yellowstone

not for publication: N/A

vicinity: N/A

code: 111

zip code: 59101

3. State/Federal Agency/Tribal Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ____ nationally ____ statewide ____ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

____ entered in the National Register

____ See continuation sheet

____ determined eligible for the National Register

____ See continuation sheet

____ determined not eligible for the National Register

____ removed from the National Register

____ other (explain):

L&L Building
Name of Property

Yellowstone, Montana
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of Resources within Property (do not include previously listed resources in the count)

<i>Contributing</i>	<i>Noncontributing</i>	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:

N/A

6. Function of Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: hotel, multiple dwelling (boarding house)

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant, bar

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant, business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and early 20th century American movements:

Two-part, western commercial style;

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: limestone

walls: brick

roof: _____

other: cast iron storefront, sheet metal cornices

Narrative Description

Please see continuation sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B removed from its original location
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave
- ☐ D a cemetery
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F a commemorative property
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

Please see continuation sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Please see continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

Ethnic Heritage- Chinese

Period of Significance:

1893-96-1930's

Significant Dates:

1893-1896 - Approx. Date of Construction

2004-2006 - Certified Historic Rehabilitation

Significant Person:

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

Chinese-American

Architect/Builder:

Unknown

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository: Western Heritage Center, Billings, Montana
Parmly Billings Library, Montana Room, Billings, Montana

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>1</u> / <u>2</u> / Zone	<u>6</u> / <u>9</u> / <u>4</u> / <u>1</u> / <u>9</u> / <u>4</u> / Easting	<u>5</u> / <u>0</u> / <u>7</u> / <u>2</u> / <u>5</u> / <u>6</u> / <u>9</u> / Northing
2	<u> </u> / <u> </u> / Zone	<u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / Easting	<u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / <u> </u> / Northing
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 See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description *Please see continuation sheet.*

Boundary Justification *Please see continuation sheet.*

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Alison LaFever

organization: High Plains Architects, P.C.

street & number: One South Broadway

city or town: Billings

state: Montana

date: March 31, 2008

telephone: (406) 896-0250

zip code: 59101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs: Representative black and white photographs of the property

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name: L&L Development Venture, L.P.

street & number: P.O. Box 1476

city or town: Billings

state: Montana

telephone: (406) 245-1307

zip code: 59103

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 202

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Name of Property: L&L Building
County and State: Yellowstone, Montana

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The L&L Building is a two-story, two-part western commercial brick building with a stone foundation. It is located just south of the railroad tracks on the southeast corner of South 27th Street and Minnesota Avenue in downtown Billings. 27th Street is busy with both car and pedestrian traffic in and out of downtown and serves as a main arterial through the heart of downtown Billings from the airport to Interstate 90. Minnesota Avenue is one of Billings' first streets and was historically the center of commerce and nightlife in Billings' early days. Located in the oldest section of Billings in the vicinity of several historically significant buildings, the L&L Building is one of the oldest extant brick commercial buildings in downtown and is an outstanding architectural element in this area. It is an excellent and well preserved example of late 19th century commercial block design, complete with a cast iron storefront and sheet metal cornices. The L&L Building retains its original design intent and many of its original features and is in excellent condition. Based on its location, design, setting, materials, and general condition and style, the L&L Building maintains sound integrity as a historic property.

The 7,500 square-foot rectangular building is long and narrow, measuring approximately 100 feet by 25 feet and occupying most of one city lot. The narrow main façade fronts north onto Minnesota Avenue and the west façade extends along South 27th Street. The L&L Building is one of two buildings that remain on the entire block. The building is adjacent to a city parking lot to the east and a skate boarding park to the south. The building's position on the corner of 27th and Minnesota and the lack of surrounding buildings gives the building a commanding presence at this location.

The building is built on a basement foundation of course limestone, which rises above the ground about one foot. A heavy sandstone base caps the foundation on the north and west (main) facades. The entire building is built of common bond pattern brick. The brick on the north and west facades has been painted a brick red color, while common bricks are used on the east and south (secondary) exterior walls. The north elevation exhibits a classic 19th century cast iron storefront and intermediate cornice between the first and second floor levels that are both original to the building.

While the cast iron columns and the intermediate cornice within the storefront system are original to the building, the other existing storefront elements were added during a 2003-2006 rehabilitation. The storefront itself sits on a concrete base with large plates of glass at the storefront level and fixed transom windows with reeded glass above, all within its original cast iron frame. The concrete base, black aluminum storefront framing, and glass are not original and were added in 2003-2006. The two entry doors sit within an angled recessed entry bay. The entry into the main floor restaurant space is centered in the recessed bay. The entry into the stairway that leads to the second floor office space is located on the angled wall of the recessed entry to the east of the center of the bay. The entry doors were also added during the 2003-2006 rehabilitation.

The storefront is very unique in that it wraps around the corner of the building and extends one bay south on the west elevation. The storefront system and intermediate cornice design is also repeated at the south end of the west elevation, marking a double door secondary entrance to both the first floor restaurant space and the second floor office space. The original cast iron storefront was designed by Herzog and Gillette of Minneapolis, a well-known Midwestern foundry that shipped their goods all over the country by rail. The manufacturer's nameplate is visible on the lower pilasters surrounding the main entrance. Once common throughout the town of Billings, this cast iron storefront frame is one of two or three remaining examples of this popular late 19th century building element. The building is also crowned by a bracketed and ornamented sheet metal cornice on the north and west elevations. Both this and the intermediate cornice have corner fluted pilasters. The L&L is the last corner building in downtown Billings that exhibits a wrap-around cornice. These well-designed features are unique elements that provide a sense of order and elegance to the building.

The fenestration is composed of tall windows set in a regular rhythm, singly and in pairs. The openings on the north and west (main) facades include segmental arched heads with brick keystones, and rough-cut sandstone sills. At the second floor level of the north façade above the storefront, there are four one-over-one double-hung windows. Two windows are centered within the façade, closer together than the other two, and share a sandstone sill. At the first floor level on the west façade, there are four, five-panel fixed windows evenly spaced across the building between the west side storefront bay and the secondary entry bay at the south end. The second floor level windows are also one-over-one double-hungs, similar to those on the north façade, and are spaced evenly across the façade. There is one window centered above the west side storefront bay, four windows above the four first floor windows, and one

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window centered above the south end of the west façade beyond the secondary entry. There are two windows, similar to those centered on the north façade, that are centered close together above the secondary entry storefront, further accenting the entry.

Both the south and east (secondary) elevations are relatively utilitarian in character. The south (rear) elevation has a tall brick chimney to the west of the centered secondary entry. A new concrete stair and ramp with a metal railing has been added to provide handicapped access. The tall west side parapet is also visible from this elevation.

All of the window openings on the east and south elevations are tall with segmental arched heads and rough cut sandstone sills. Nearly all of the original window openings on these elevations have been filled in and covered with a siding designed to look like brick. The siding panels are made of a thermoplastic resin in a hand laid brick pattern. The product was approved by the National Park Service and does not take away from the historic character of the building. Only one original window opening remains, centered above the entry door at the second floor level on the south (rear) elevation. The other three window openings on the south elevation have been filled in, as well as eight at the second floor level and two at the south end of the first floor level on the east elevation. The windows on the east elevation were infilled in order to comply with code because the building was built on the property line.

On the interior, the first floor level has a relatively open floor plan. It originally housed a restaurant and bar, however it had been altered many times over the years and no original interior building fabric remains. It is now home to a Subway restaurant. The second floor has a long central corridor with office spaces in rooms off the corridor. Originally the second floor was used as a boarding house, with its space divided into many small rooms that were rented out to lodgers. This original interior layout remains and is finished to represent what existed originally, however no original interior building fabric remains.

Since it was built, the building has been significantly altered, although it is not known for sure when. The original storefront elements, except the original cast iron framing, were removed and filled in with mismatched red brick and glass block on the lower portion and glass block in the clerestory above. The main entry was moved to the east end of the north elevation and covered with a metal shed awning. The building was later neglected and left vacant for about ten years. It deteriorated to a very poor condition with flaking paint, missing and broken windows, a leaking roof and the need for repointing of the masonry. Before the building's rehabilitation in 2003, due to the several missing and broken windows, the second floor was filled with two and a half feet of pigeon guano and carcasses. The original second floor walls, flooring, and ceiling were contaminated with the bird waste and were removed as part of a hazardous materials abatement.

Between 2004 and 2006, the entire building underwent a certified historic tax credit rehabilitation. The non-historic interior and exterior elements were removed and most of the historically insensitive alterations were reversed in order to revitalize the building to resemble its 19th century appearance. The brick infill on the north elevation storefront was removed and the original cast iron storefront frame was repainted and restored. A new black aluminum storefront system was incorporated into the original cast iron framework. Although it is not known for sure what existed originally, this new storefront system, complete with large panes of glass, reeded glass transom windows, and recessed entry, were all based on what may have existed originally. Although no historic photographs of the L&L Building were found, the design of the new storefront was based on a historic photograph of Chapple Drug, which was located in the Belknap Block a couple blocks away on the northeast corner of Montana Avenue and Broadway. Chapple Drug, which is no longer extant, was built around the same time as the L&L Building and shared similar design characteristics such as a sheet metal cornice and cast iron storefront columns and was therefore a good model on which to base the new storefront for the L&L Building. Storefront elements such as the recessed entry and reeded glass transom windows were noted in the historic photograph of Chapple Drug and recreated in the L&L Building. Also, after the brick infill was removed, the floor framing revealed that the L&L Building did indeed have a recessed entry originally.

Also as part of the 2004-2006 rehabilitation, the sheet metal cornices were cleaned and repainted and missing capped modillions were replaced to match the originals. The window sashes and glazing on the north and west elevations were replaced while the existing wood frames and casings were retained and refurbished. Existing wood window frames and sashes were removed on the east elevation and infilled in order to comply with the building code that does not allow window openings in walls that are built on the property line.

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The windows were infilled with an appropriate brick-like siding and set back slightly from the face of the building, in order to preserve the character of the original window openings. Two large steel frames, one at the north end of the building and one at the south end, were added to provide necessary structural support. New foundations were poured in the basement to support the frame, which extends from the basement through the building to the underside of the roof deck. It was installed to comply with current building codes. For the most part, the frame is relatively concealed except for a portion of it that is visible at the north end of the first floor interior.

Upon completion of the rehabilitation, the unique design and historic integrity of the L&L Building was restored. All repairs and replacements were done in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation in order to preserve the building's historic character. The building is currently in excellent condition and retains a high degree of historic integrity. The site, setting, and overall architectural character of the L&L Building aptly validate its significance as a historic property and render it worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Statement of Significance:***Summary***

The L&L Building is directly associated with the initial period of downtown Billings development at the end of the 19th century following the founding of Billings in 1882. With the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad in August of 1882, and subsequent railroads in 1894, Billings quickly grew to become a regional railroad hub, which led to rapid growth and economic development in the downtown area. The commercial area adjacent to the railroad tracks along Montana and Minnesota Avenues was the first area in Billings to be developed with businesses dependent upon or directly related to the railroad. Minnesota Avenue in particular became concentrated with hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, saloons, and stores and became one of Billings' main streets for business and entertainment during its earliest years. The buildings erected in the first years after the city was founded were quickly constructed wood frame structures, which were later replaced with more substantial buildings of brick and stone. The L&L Building was one of the earliest two-story brick commercial buildings built on the Minnesota Avenue and it represents the second generation of building forms and types located along Minnesota Avenue. The L&L Building is also significant for its associations with the Chinese District that developed south of the tracks at the eastern end of Minnesota Avenue.

While the Minnesota Avenue corridor became home to significant businesses that provided much needed everyday goods like groceries and hardware, many of the businesses that developed south of the tracks catered to less venerable interests. The south side of the tracks quickly developed the reputation for being the wilder more liberal side of the tracks and served as Billings' raucous environment and center of nightlife. The L&L Building served as a restaurant/saloon and lodging house from the time it was built through the 1920's and as a bar in later years and strongly fits into the historic context of the surrounding area. The period of significance of the L&L Building is between 1893-96 and the 1930's, from the time the building was built (approximately) to the time when many businesses began to move out of the area, leaving many small commercial buildings, like the L&L, vacant and the area became less concentrated with activity. The L&L Building still conveys much of the original design intent and retains a high level of integrity as both a historically and architecturally significant property. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, and C. It is significant for its strong association with the commercial and transportation history of Billings during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well the social and cultural development of the Billings community, including in particular, a significant Chinese-American culture. It is also significant for its representation of a particular late 19th century western commercial architectural style that was popular amongst the commercial buildings in downtown Billings, of which very few remain in the surrounding area.

Historic Context

The city of Billings was founded in 1882 when the Northern Pacific Railroad determined the route of its new transcontinental railroad west through the Yellowstone Valley. The location of Billings was determined by a section of land that the railroad had acquired from the government that was twice the size of other land sections along the route. This presented an opportunity to not only establish a large city and regional railroad hub, but also for the railroad to profit considerably from the sale of the land to settlers and land developers.¹ A group of investors linked to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company formed the Minnesota and Montana Avenue Land Improvement Company, obtained land from the railroad, and platted the townsite of Billings in March of 1882. The townsite, named for former Northern Pacific Railroad president and M&MLI investor Frederick Billings, flanked the railroad right-of-way with Montana Avenue to the north of the tracks and Minnesota Avenue to the south, with streets for businesses and homes projecting out on a rectilinear grid. These two streets, named for the parent land company responsible for their development, formed the commercial center of the new community.²

¹ Chere Justo, "Tales Spun Along the Tracks: A History of Downtown Billings," (*Downtown Billings Historic and Architectural Survey*, Fall-Winter 1998), p. 3.

² Justo, p. 2.

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The railroad town grew quickly into a bustling commercial center as merchants, bankers, and entrepreneurs rushed to set up business and land seeking homesteaders flooded into the valley to farm. Because milled lumber was expensive and in limited supply in the newly founded town, much of the early building development consisted of quickly constructed rough-hewn log structures and even tents. In order to achieve a look of permanency, many merchants applied false lumber fronts to their buildings in order to achieve a look of permanency, typical of western towns. The seemingly overnight development of the city of Billings from a small railroad town garnered the nickname the Magic City, which is still used today. The building boom continued as the town grew and building materials such as brick and milled lumber became more readily available. By the end of 1883, there were nearly 400 buildings encompassing a nine-block area that was home to over 1,500 people.³

Although Billings began to expand both north and south of the tracks, Montana and Minnesota Avenues remained the center of commerce and development. Small businesses such as restaurants, mercantiles, and lodging houses were established in order to accommodate the growing population. Merchants, farmers, preachers, and doctors were all lured to Billings by the promise that town promoters had made that Billings was set to become the next major western city. By 1884, the streets of both Montana and Minnesota Avenues were littered with grocery and hardware stores, most notably the P.W. McAdow Grocery at the corner of South 27th Street and Minnesota Avenue, as well as liveryies, blacksmiths and warehouses.

Despite the development that new businesses and planning brought to town, Billings in its earliest years was at its heart a classic western boom town, with all the characteristics typical of the Wild West. Drinking, gambling and prostitution were all brazenly pursued through town and cowboys rode wild through the streets.⁴ Minnesota Avenue in particular became concentrated with dance halls, saloons, and theaters and garnered the reputation early on for its bawdy businesses and boisterous nightlife.⁵ Minnesota Avenue was also the scene for most of the "red light district" activities. Numerous "female boarding houses" were located all along the Minnesota Avenue corridor disguised behind drab facades of hotel walkups. Prostitution was such a prevalent activity that by 1912 there were 19 of these establishments within a three block stretch of Minnesota Avenue between 23rd and 26th Avenues expanding from just a handful within one block in 1890.

Despite its notorious reputation, Minnesota Avenue was also home to significant businesses such as the Yegen Block. Built between 1891-96, the Yegen Block is a collection of buildings that housed the various Yegen Brothers businesses such as a store with a hardware department, a grocery department, and a clothing department, as well as a bank. The Yegens were an influential family in Yellowstone County that had built up a diverse portfolio of business including insurance and real estate firms between the turn of the century and the 1930's. The Yegen Block served as one of Minnesota Avenues most significant businesses through the 1930's when business within the block began to move out.⁶

By the 1890's, the city began to settle down from its initial boom and into steady growth. This streak of prosperity and optimism for the future was reflected in handsome brick and masonry facades that were built along Montana Avenue. As Billings continued to grow, more substantial buildings of brick or stone began to replace the rough and ragged false front stores that were erected in the first years after the town site opened to development. ⁷ Only a few of these early wood-frame buildings remain. Fire damage and the desire of business and property owners to improve their holdings were among other reasons that the early buildings were replaced. Some of these turn of the century buildings, like the L&L, were built with beautiful cast iron storefronts, metal cornices and other architectural details while others were built more simply.

Montana and Minnesota Avenues continued to evolve through the turn of the century. In 1894, the Burlington Northern (CB&Q) Railroad arrived in Billings, followed by the Great Northern Railroad in 1909. The rail-based economy exploded and Billings became the center of regional rail transportation at the junction of three major rail lines with connections to Chicago, Seattle, Denver, and Omaha. Also in 1909, Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act, doubling the size of farm land a homesteader could lay claim to

³ Justo, p. 6.

⁴ Carrol Van West, *Images of Billings- A Photographic History*, (Western Heritage Center Press, 1990).

⁵ Anneke-Jan Boden, *Billings: The First 100 Years*. (Billings: First Bank, 1982).

⁶ Stephanie Kralovec, *Billings Historic District Inventory*, (2005).

⁷ Boden.

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and launching a land rush in the west. In the years that followed, 30-40,000 people moved onto the agricultural frontiers of Eastern Montana. The population of Billings tripled from 3,221 residents in 1900 to 10,031 in 1910, ranking Billings the 6th fastest growing community in the nation in the 1910 census.⁸

Billings quickly became the economic hub for an enormous region and a burgeoning agricultural economy. The railroad played a huge part in the transport of agricultural goods throughout the region and therefore much of the economy of Eastern Montana and Northern Wyoming revolved around the Billings market. Accordingly, the business district developing along the railroad tracks flourished as Billings boomed. The corridor along the railroad became densely built up with businesses from about the turn of the century on. Businesses dealing in agricultural implements, hardware, mechanized harvesting equipment grew in both size and numbers during this time and a large warehouse district emerged along within the commercial area surrounding the railroad tracks. Increasing numbers of wholesale warehouses such as the Swift & Company Building were constructed along or near the tracks as the town and its agricultural markets grew and diversified. Other small businesses developed north of the tracks that filled out the complement of businesses and services in the young and growing city.

By the 1920's and 1930's, development along Minnesota Avenue began to slow down. Several smaller commercial buildings were left vacant while the warehouses and large businesses along the tracks continued to thrive. During prohibition, Minnesota Avenue became the center of bootlegging activities as well as an underground drug market.⁹ The reputation for the area being crime ridden and wild was solidified during this era. Many of the small buildings along Minnesota Avenue were occupied by rough and rowdy bars in the later half of the 20th century. The area remained the less desirable part of town until recent years. The neighborhood is currently undergoing somewhat of a transformation, as historic buildings are being occupied and restored, and breathing new life into an area that at one time was the heart of a busy and exciting Billings.

Chinese District Context

The railroad and the rapid initial growth of the townsite drew settlers from far and wide to Billings. Westward expansion provided great opportunities for settlers to move west, many of which were new immigrants who brought a mix of culture to the area. Billings, and Minnesota Avenue in particular, became home to a sizeable Chinese population. The Northern Pacific Railroad employed many Chinese workers on their rail crews and many of them settled in the new city of Billings when the railroad was finished. This was a trend that was common across several other growing Montana frontier towns and closely related to general Chinese immigration trends in the American West in the late 19th century.¹⁰

Large scale Chinese immigration to America began in the late 1840's and early 1850's, spurred on initially by the great gold discoveries in California.¹¹ With the gradual decline of the placer claims there, Chinese workers entered into other employment or moved on to other regions. By the 1860's, with the discovery of gold at places like Alder Gulch in Virginia City and Last Chance Gulch in Helena, a sizeable Chinese population had established itself in Montana. As the gold mining industry began to slow down in the late 1870's and 1880's, many Chinese immigrants in Montana went to work on the railroad. The labor of Chinese workers was essential to the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad.¹² The arrival of Chinese miners and railroad workers helped to create other economic opportunities for Chinese pioneers and many local Chinese communities began to develop throughout Montana. The Chinese were employed by a great diversity of occupations, such as tailors, cooks, gardeners, woodcutters, and herbal doctors in other growing towns like Anaconda, Butte, Dillon, and Helena. Most commonly, they opened laundries and Chinese restaurants.¹³

⁸ Jiusto, p.19.

⁹ Boden.

¹⁰ George Everett, "Butte's Far Eastern Influences," *Only in Butte: Where the Past is Never Far Behind Us in Butte, America*. (2004) www.butteamerica.com/fareast

¹¹ Robert R. Swartout, Jr. "Kwangtung to Big Sky: The Chinese in Montana, 1864-1900" *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*. (Winter 1998) p. 44.

¹² Swartout, p. 46.

¹³ Everett.

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The Chinese pioneers in Montana created a vibrant and complex social network in order to perpetuate many of their traditional social and cultural practices. Such activities were important in helping the immigrants maintain a sense of identity and community, particularly when faced with rather hostile anti-Chinese sentiment and discriminatory anti-Chinese laws. Economic depression and the end of large scale labor projects such as the railroads fed anti-Chinese sentiment.¹⁴ The Chinese were often excluded and deprived of rights and privileges enjoyed by other immigrant groups. Despite their poor treatment, the Chinese contribution to the economic development of 19th century Montana, through the railroad, mining, and the establishment of entrepreneur businesses played a crucial role in transforming Montana to sophisticated and economically prosperous society. The anti-Chinese sentiment of the day is a main reason why most of the contributions of Chinese immigrants in Montana have gone largely unrecognized.

Butte was home to the largest Chinese community in Montana, despite organized efforts of discrimination. By 1910, Butte was a booming industrial metropolis of nearly 100,000 with a thriving Chinatown of 400-600 Chinese.¹⁵ Although the Chinese population in Billings never grew beyond 100, their presence in the community and their effect on the history of Billings is incredibly significant.

Even as early as 1883, Chinese immigrants, many of which were born in China and had families still in China, moved in to Billings and set up businesses providing goods and services to Chinese and non-Chinese patrons within the growing community. The majority of Chinese-owned businesses were restaurants and laundries. Like Chinese communities that had developed in Butte and other towns across Montana, a small yet significant Chinese community developed in Block 189 where the L&L Building now stands. The Chinese district was bordered by Minnesota Avenue to the north, First Avenue South to the south, and South 26th and South 27th Streets on the sides. It was divided by two alleys, one connecting 26th and 27th Streets, and one running parallel to First Avenue South. This small area became known throughout Billings as China Alley.¹⁶

The Chinese in Billings lived close together, primarily in cramped, humble quarters. They kept to themselves, integrating very little into white society. They brought with them their food, culture, and religion and created their own society within China Alley. Certain Chinese customs, such as regular opium use and the mystic game of fan-tan, were notorious in the district, however for the most part the district was relatively undisturbed by crime in its earliest days. However, after World War I, the population of the area began to change. A new group of Chinese and non-Chinese residents began to replace the older, first generation immigrants, and new businesses were established, not all of which were legitimate. As the prohibition era began in the 1920's, China Alley became the center of a underground bootlegging activities and a narcotics trade.¹⁷ As narcotics use spread across the country, demands for opium, cocaine, morphine, and heroin created a big business out of drug dealing, even in smaller communities such as Billings. Numerous raids were made from 1929 to 1934 by federal officers in an effort to put an end to narcotics dealing in Billings. One large raid in particular in 1934 of a large opium den in the basement of the Maple Leaf Club, brought a virtual end to China Alley's underground drug trafficking era.¹⁸ By the 1940's, the district was virtually deserted.¹⁹ Several buildings were left vacant and many of the former Chinese residents and business owners had moved out, and the culture of Billings' Chinese District slowly faded away.

L&L Building History

Although the exact date of construction cannot be determined, the L&L Building was built sometime between 1893-1896. It's construction was concurrent with the late 19th century building boom, during which many of the first generation wood frame buildings that were built when Billings was first founded were replaced with more substantial and ornamented buildings of brick and stone. The first known building to occupy this lot was a small wood frame building that housed a grocery store. By 1891 that building was gone and was replaced by the L&L Building between 1893 and 1896. The L&L Building was among the first brick commercial buildings built on the south side of the tracks. After it was completed, other brick buildings along Minnesota Avenue soon followed.

¹⁴ Swartout, p. 48.

¹⁵ Everett.

¹⁶ Bob White, "Stories of Dark Deeds in Old China Alley are Said to Have Been Exaggerated After Passage of Time," *Billings Gazette*, October 31, 1943.

¹⁷ White.

¹⁸ "Sheriff's Force Wrecks Opium Den in South Side Raid," *Billings Gazette*, August, 10, 1934.

¹⁹ White.

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Deed records reveal that the property was owned by O.C. Krieger of Livingston and in 1896 was sold to Sam Lee for \$2,000. Sam Lee was somewhat of a leader within the Chinese community, one of the few whose name is mentioned in various newspaper and business articles, as well as one of the most well known and successful business men in the area. At one time, he owned many of the businesses located in the block around China Alley.²⁰ Sam Lee operated a Chinese restaurant and lodging house in the L&L Building with his brother Yee. The building was named L&L for Lee & Lee, after Yee and Sam. By 1900, they advertised "L&L Wines, Liquors, and Cigars" with "Nicely Furnished Rooms" on the second floor. After that time, the building was listed as the L&L Building Rooming House, a "First Class Lodging House Good as a Bank."²¹

In the 1910's, the first floor space was occupied by a succession of saloons and liquors stores with various proprietors. Ownership passed to Louis She Yung, then Yee Gar Yung before reverting to Yellowstone County for owed taxes. During the 1920's, Antonio Jacobucci and Gabriel Servidio had a soft drink business in the building. By the 1930's, the building was vacant. In recent decades, the building housed the notorious Arcade Bar, a typically bawdy Minnesota Avenue establishment, until it shut its doors several years ago. Since that time, the building had been vacant and allowed to deteriorate. In 2003, the building was purchased and underwent a comprehensive certified historic rehabilitation to restore the original design elements and preserve the historic character of the building.

Architectural Context

Due to its rapid growth and development as a result of the railroad, Billings was quickly transformed from a collection of roughly built wooden structures to more substantial brick and stone buildings at the turn of the 20th century. This change followed community efforts to establish more permanency and style in the business district and a vision of long-term growth and development. Most of the buildings of this era were designed and built by local architects and contractors and therefore represent vernacular styles. Buildings built before the turn of the century tended to be more ornamental in design; however after about 1910, commercial architecture became more basic and functional in its design, with relatively modest brickwork patterning as ornament.²² The L&L Building's style typifies this architectural period. The building is an excellent example of the late 19th century vernacular commercial architecture, complete with details common to that era such as a cast iron storefront, sheet metal cornice, and segmental arched window openings.

The L&L Building is highly cohesive with the historic architectural character of the surrounding area. At one time, there were many buildings in downtown Billings with similar ornamental building elements; however this is one of the few that remains. Other buildings along Minnesota Avenue share a similar vintage, historic context, and design features. Additionally, the L&L Building is bordered to the north side of the neighboring railroad tracks by the Billings Townsite Historic District, which is also significant for its associations with the early commercial development of Billings. These buildings as a whole represent a significant era in the history of downtown Billings, and share the Western commercial architectural style, historic character, and integrity of the L&L Building.

Conclusion

The L&L Building is highly significant, for both its historical associations and its architectural significance. It is an integral part of the Minnesota Avenue business corridor, which was the heart of the original Billings townsite after it was founded in 1882. Located at the northwest corner of Billings' Chinese District, the building is also significant for its association with Chinese businesses that were located in the building and the history of the Chinese in Billings, as well as throughout Montana. Architecturally, the building is a strong example of late 19th century design and is one of the few remaining buildings in the area that features ornamental design elements such as the cast iron storefront and wrap around sheet-metal cornice. As a whole, the L&L building represents a variety of historical and architectural contexts that tells the story of Billings' earliest years.

²⁰ White.

²¹ Polk's City Directories. (c. 1883-1935).

²² Ann Kooistra-Manning, *Billings Townsite Historic District (Boundary Increase I)* National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. (United States Dept. of the Interior, April 21, 2006) p.12.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The L&L Building is located in Lot 18 in Block 189 of the Billings Original Townsite Subdivision, Yellowstone County, Montana according to the official plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the Clerk and Recorder of said County.

Boundary Justification:

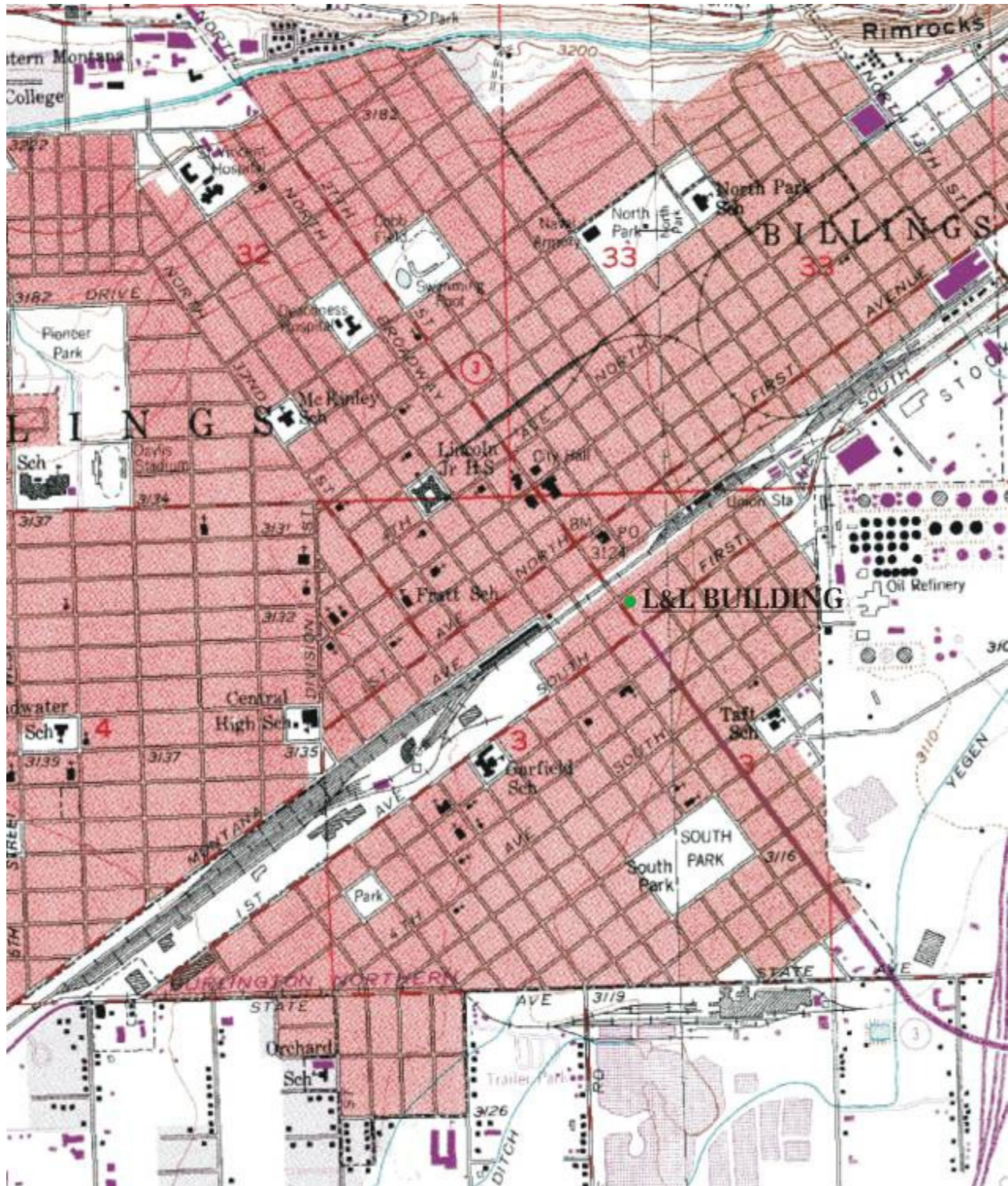
This is the legal boundary description of the property. The boundary of the property is the city lot that has retained its original property lines since the building was built c.1893-96.

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Name of Property: L&L Building
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All Photographs

Photographer: Alison LaFever
High Plains Architects
Billings, MT

Location of Negatives: N/A, Digital Photographs
Disk on file at MT SHPO



L&L #1

Date: February 2008

View to: Southeast

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L&L #2

Date: February 2008

View to: South

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L&L #3

Date: February 2008

View to: East

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Name of Property: L&L Building
County and State: Yellowstone, Montana

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L&L #4

Date: February 2008

View to: North

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County and State: Yellowstone, Montana

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L&L #5

Date: February 2008

View to: West

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L&L #6

Date: March 2008

View to: Southeast, Cast Iron Storefront Detail

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L&L #7

Date: February 2008

View to: Cornice Details

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L&L #8

Date: February 2008

View to: Upper Cornice Detail

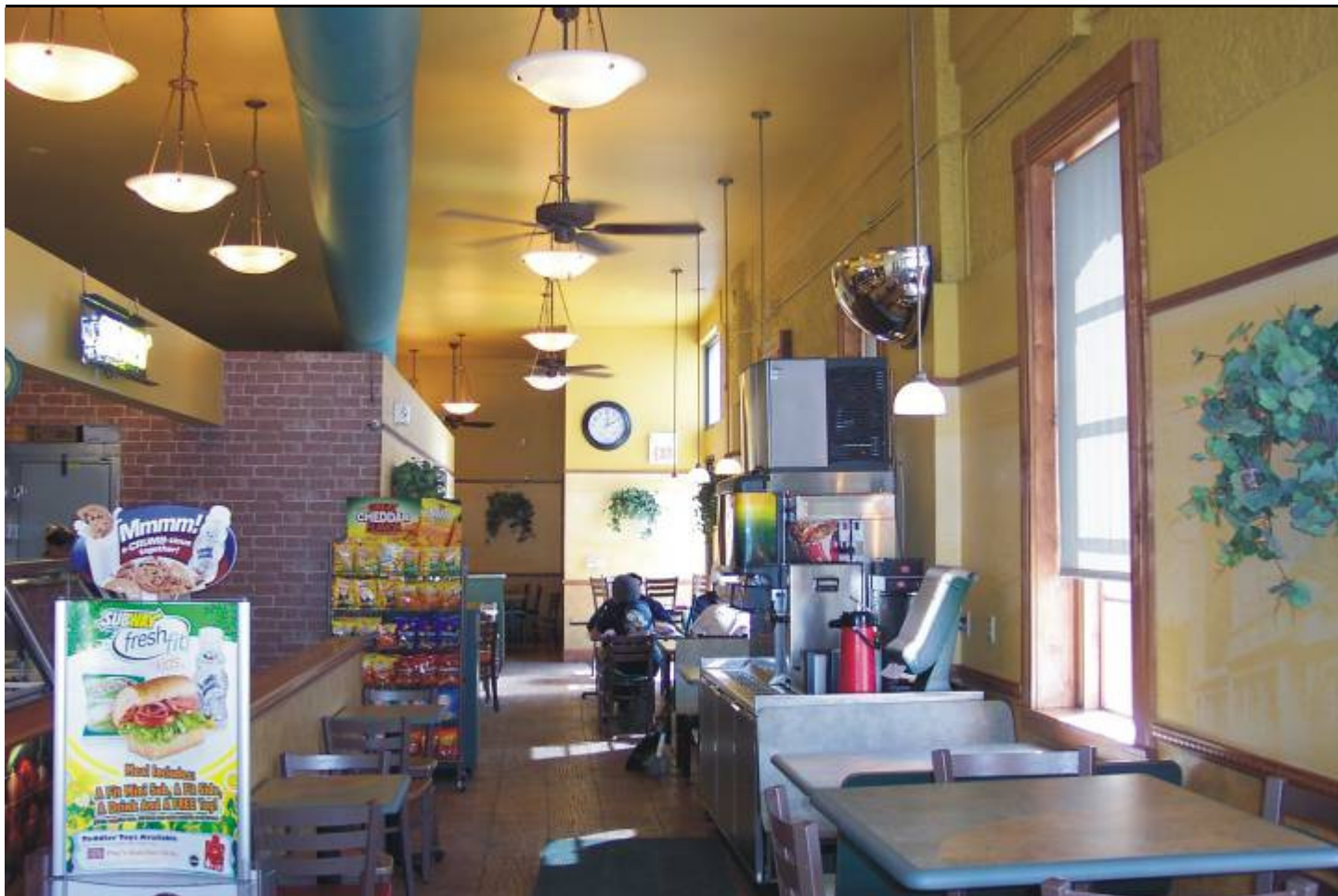
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L&L #9

Date: March 2008

View to: South- First Floor Interior

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L&L #10

Date: March 2008

View to: South- Second Floor Interior Corridor